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Coastal Cleanup Day an Effective Method for Improving Knowledge Of Environmental Problems Caused by Marine Debris

July 5, 2011 – California Coastal Cleanup Day, the state’s largest volunteer event, has been shown to be an effective method for educating participants about the harmful environmental impacts of marine debris, a statewide survey has shown. Cleanup organizers announced the results of the survey, taken after the 2010 Cleanup, in anticipation of the upcoming 27th Annual California Coastal Cleanup Day, which will take place on Saturday, September 17th from 9 Am to Noon. The event will take place at more than 800 locations around the state, comprising the largest single effort to remove the debris that has accumulated on California’s beaches and inland shorelines over the past year.

In a survey of over 1,000 participants in the 2010 Cleanup, dramatic increases in knowledge of the causes and impacts of marine debris were shown as a result of participation in the event. 83.1% of respondents considered themselves either “knowledgeable” or “very knowledgeable” about the causes of marine debris after the event, as opposed to only 58.9% before the event, a 24.2% increase. Similarly, 77.7% of all survey takers considered themselves “knowledgeable” or “very knowledgeable” about the impacts caused by marine debris after the event, as opposed to 61.2% before the event, an increase of 16.5%.

“The results of the survey confirm what we’d always believed about Coastal Cleanup Day but until now, could not prove: that the Cleanup is a powerful educational tool in addition to being one of the shining examples of coastal stewardship our state enjoys each year,” said Christiane Parry, Director of the California Coastal Commission’s Public Education Program. “Even while cleaning up, our volunteers are able to make the connection between the trash they are removing from the shore and the trash that they create in their daily lives. It’s a powerful reminder that we can take simple steps to keep our coast clean every day of the year.”

The Coastal Cleanup Day Program has taken steps in recent years to put some of the lessons from the Cleanup into practice as it prepares for each subsequent event. In 2010, the Coastal Commission launched a program known as “BYO for CCD,” an initiative in which the Commission asked volunteers

to bring their own reusable bag or bucket and a pair of reusable gloves from home to collect debris during the Cleanup, rather than using the single-use disposable bags and gloves available at each Cleanup location. In its first year, the initiative was successful enough that just over one-quarter of all Cleanup participants brought at least one reusable item from home for use during the Cleanup, totaling over 20,000 volunteers. The initiative also enabled the purchase of 30,000 fewer plastic trash bags for use during the Cleanup, a significant savings of resources. The Coastal Commission will continue and grow the BYO effort in 2011, and anticipates an even greater response as more volunteers learn of the initiative.

The Commission's efforts to reduce the amount of trash created by the Cleanup become even more important in light of the incredible growth the Cleanup has enjoyed over the past four years. Over 82,500 volunteers participated in the 2010 Cleanup, an all-time record for participation and a 62 percent increase in volunteers since the 2007 event. (Included, somewhere, in those 82,500 volunteers was the 1 millionth Coastal Cleanup Day volunteer since the program began in 1985.) Those volunteers removed more than 1.2 million pounds of debris from California's shorelines, over 200,000 pounds of which was recycled. Plastic debris makes up close to 80 percent, by item, of the debris removed, and single-use disposable plastic goods accounts for almost all of that 80 percent.

For those who don't want to wait until September to start cleaning California's beaches, the Coastal Commission also runs a year-round beach cleanup program called Adopt-A-Beach. When a group adopts a beach they commit to cleaning it three times per year (school groups are required to clean up only once per year). The program has been a success since its inception in 1985, but always needs helping hands. Schools, youth groups, community groups, churches, businesses and individuals contribute to this year-round effort.

For more information on last year's Cleanup or any of the new initiatives planned for 2011, please visit ww.coastforyou.org.

The statewide event is presented by the California Coastal Commission with major statewide support from Crystal Geysers, Oracle and Whole Foods Market. Additional support comes from Natracare, Fairmont Hotels and Resorts, San Francisco Department of the Environment, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, and Marin County Board of Supervisors.

California Coastal Cleanup Day 2011 is supported by the California Coastal Commission, California State Parks Foundation, and Ocean Conservancy. This event is made possible by the hard work of hundreds of local non-profits and government agencies throughout the state and tens of thousands of volunteers annually